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Turbine model contracts awarded for McNary power plant project

Walla Walla, Wash.– Efforts to explore improvements to the Columbia River power plant at McNary Dam took a step forward recently with the award of four contracts to build turbine models.

Four firms specializing in manufacturing large hydroelectric turbines will each design, build and test models of a new turbine they would propose to install at McNary. The model turbines are a preliminary step in the team effort by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bonneville Power Administration to evaluate options for upgrading the power generating equipment at McNary Dam near Umatilla, Ore.

Contracts for $750,000 to design, manufacture and test hydraulic turbine models were awarded to Alstom Power, Littleton, Colo.; G.E. Hydro Power, Inc. Pleasanton, Calif.; VA Tech Voest MCE Corporation Charlotte, N.C.; and Voith Siemens Hydro Power Generation, Inc., York, Pa., on June 14.

The turbine models will be subjected to an extensive series of hydraulic and performance tests, then will be evaluated for biological suitability and power efficiency. From the four models, the Corps and BPA expect to select a contractor to install an operational full-size turbine in the McNary Dam powerhouse.

The full-size turbine will be subjected to in-stream biological testing and evaluated for both fish survival and hydraulic performance. The test results will be incorporated as part of the National Environmental Policy Act analysis.

With the work under way, the Corps and BPA expect to complete the model testing by January 2004 and may be looking at completing the installation of a full-size unit as early as April 2006.

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"The outcome of the testing, analysis and the public input process could lead to a federal decision to replace all 14 turbines," said Kevin Crum, project manager for the Corps.

"The entire turbine upgrade project could be completed as soon as 2015 for an estimated $160 million, depending on the outcome of the analysis and testing," Crum added.

Initial studies say modernizing turbines and related systems can improve power availability and hydraulic capacity, said Michael Berger, BPA project representative.

"Estimates are that the project could increase electrical output by 15 percent, if fully implemented with 14 modernized turbines. This is based on an average water year," said Berger.

McNary Dam is one of four Corps hydroelectric projects on the main stem of the lower Columbia River. Congress authorized the dam in 1945 and the Corps began construction in 1947. The dam was completed in 1953 and all 14 turbines in the powerhouse were operating by February 1957.

The McNary Dam powerhouse is nearly 50 years old. No significant investments have been made to improve the efficiency of the generating units since they were installed.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bonneville Power Administration are striving to achieve environmentally sustainable solutions to hydropower issues.

More information about the McNary powerhouse modernization is available on web sites for the Walla Walla District at www.nww.usace.army.mil/mcn-mod and BPA at www.bpa.gov.

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